Cold Creek strategic plan released; input sought

By Mark Pavilons

The future looks bright for one of King's most precious natural resources.

King council recently received the draft Cold Creek Conservation Area Strategic Plan and is looking for feedback and recommendations from the public.

The plan guides the Township's operations of the site over the next five years. The property is enjoyed by residents and visitors and used for educational and recreational activities for school groups, community groups and public events.

Cold Creek was reopened in 2006 by the Township, after negotiating a 99-year lease with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

Consultants Cambium Inc. were hired in September 2014 to create the plan. Consultation has taken place with Township staff, council and key stakeholders to identify the needs and future growth.

As an important next step, Cambium and staff will re-engage key decision-makers, stakeholders and community groups prior to finalizing the plan.

The plan outlines five strategic objectives and actionable projects.

Hopes are Cold Creek will become a ?model of sustainability,? and ways will be developed to reduce any environmental impacts of programs.

An invasive species management plan will be created to log, plan for and manage invasive species at Cold Creek. Hopes are the Township can call upon students at Seneca College and Fleming College to help complete the inventory.

The area contains a variety of forests, so a forestry management plan is recommended. An inventory and suggested tree thinning and/or harvesting would be part of the plan.

Cold Creek is a hive of activity and provides outdoor educational, cultural, heritage and recreational experiences.

It's recommended a spatial analysis and accessibility action plan be done.

A new decision-making model will reflect the need to generate self-sustaining revenue for the site. A market analysis will be done to ensure King is maximizing opportunities to generate money at Cold Creek, to offset the costs.

Volunteers and local ?stewards??have been integral to the park's success.

It's suggested a ?Friends of Cold?Creek??group be established to help staff in various projects and functions.

There's also a push to develop a more comprehensive attraction, management and orientation program for volunteers supporting the area.

All of these can be completed in a few years, within the five-year scope of the plan.

After receiving feedback from council, stakeholders and community groups, Township staff will bring it back to be finalized by council Feb. 23.

From humble beginnings, Cold Creek became a hive of activity and the site was popular among sports shooting enthusiasts through the mid-1990s when resident complaints about the noise led to those activities being eliminated. It was closed to the public in 1992 and the property sat dormant, until local conservationists, TRCA and King Township staff came together to create a plan for the future of Cold Creek. TRCA initiated the comprehensive management plan in 2002 which includes an evaluation of the property and policies on features, functions, environmental constraints and opportunities. The plan provides a framework for the future.

Its name comes from the fact this Humber River tributary retains its cold temperatures. It's not uncommon for the water temperature to hover between 15 and 20 degrees Celsius in the summer. As the creek flows from the upswelling sources to the 11th Concession, the temperature rises only two degrees. By comparison, pond surface water is typically five to 15 degrees warmer than Cold Creek. This creates a ?micro-climate? and the chilly groundwater in this area, combined with tree cover, lowers the air temperature about 10 degrees in the summer.

Cold Creek is a small ecosystem, which is part of several larger significant natural systems such as the Cold Creek subwatershed, Oak Ridges Moraine and Humber River watershed. The majority of the Cold Creek subwatershed is located on the moraine and serves a vital groundwater recharge function.